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ABSTRACT

The author suggests that "open" university and education programs may require a reconceptualization of processes for selecting media. The media for the delivery of instruction (e.g., computers, television, and film) should be considered along with the role of organizations which use media and those which provide media support. In open learning situations, public libraries may make valuable contributions to the total delivery system. This paper examines: (1) the problem arising from the failure to account for the role of organizations in media selection; (2) the criteria for choosing organizations to assist in the delivery of open education; and (3) the characteristics of public libraries which may determine how libraries "measure up" to the suggested criteria. (Author/DAG)

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ORGANIZATIONAL DELIVERY SYSTEMS AND MEDIA FOR OPEN LEARNING: THE CASE FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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ORGANIZATIONAL DELIVERY SYSTEMS AND MEDIA FOR OPEN LEARNING: THE CASE FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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There is a growing movement to develop mechanisms for more open learning. Recent establishment of the University of Mid-America, Empire State College and numerous external degree programs is evidence of this trend. Such "open" university and education programs may require a reconceptualization of processes for selecting media. Usually, these processes focus on the use of computers, television, film and other paraphernalia for delivering instruction with little regard for the role of organizations which use media and which provide media support. Media and organizations are seldom perceived as together forming a total instructional delivery system, and media selection decisions are frequently made "out of context" with deleterious results. An assertion of this paper is that consideration of both media and organizations provides a more appropriate framework for designing and selecting ways for delivering instruction, especially in open learning situations. It is also suggested that public libraries are organizations that may make valuable contributions to total delivery systems for open education. On the pages that follow, problems arising from failure to account for the role of organizations in media selection will be examined, and criteria for choosing organizations to assist in the delivery of open education will be advanced. Finally, characteristics of public libraries will be described in order to determine how libraries "measure up" to the suggested criteria.

Problems of Oversight

Instructional media are often selected without regard for organizations which use media and provide media support. Educators tend to consider only part of a total delivery system for instruction--the mechanical-technological component. Such media myopia is probably an historical artifact that may have undersirable consequences for the delivery of open education.

One reason educators ignore organizations in media selection is that recommended selection procedures often fail to direct their attention to the contexts in which media will be used. Media taxonomies have tended to focus upon media's physical attributes (cf. Breta, 1971) and media research has tended to concentrate on task, stimulus-response, and sequence variables (cf. Clark, 1975). Selection procedures derived from research and experience tend to mirror this bias (cf. Briggs et al, 1967; Tosti and Ball, 1969). Media accommodation of instructionally effective messages is emphasized with little or no regard for context. Although this focus is perhaps a more valid and useful basis for media choice than personal preference or outmoded aphorisms, such as "people learn better when instruction is visualized," problems arise when practitioners concentrate on media's instructional contributions to the point of neglecting media's harmony with the educational environment. Computers may be ideal for delivering instruction that teaches certain outcomes, but may lack utility because students lack access to terminals or because money and expertise required to maintain computer systems is unavailable. Use of some media is not feasible when their ability to accommodate instruction is balanced with their ecological impacts (Popham, 1969).

Another reason organizations are overlooked in the selection of instructional media is that traditionally the school has been the predominate institution using media and providing media support. There has been little need

to consider the role of different organizations as part of a total instructional delivery system. Further, the nature of schools is relatively well known. Studies of school media resources are periodically conducted (cf. Godfrey, 1966; Dukiet, 1973), and other aspects of schools are frequently investigated. General knowledge of schools may subliminally influence the selection of media for use in school contexts even when questions pertaining to the effects of schools on media use are not confronted directly. More systematic consideration of organization roles in delivery of mediated instruction may be warranted, however, when the context for learning is broader and perhaps more ambiguous.

Open university selection of television, film, radio and other media without first analyzing organizational contexts for learning, such as businesses, libraries and centers for the aged can lead to erroneous decisions. One such decision involves the assumption that instruction will likely occur in the home and that the home is the best alternative to the school. This may not be true. Businesses and community centers, for example, may contribute to open education by offering environments where learners may practice skills, discuss concepts, receive peer instruction, interact socially, and engage in other educational activities. Many of these activities might be difficult to provide at home.

Another erroneous decision that might result from divorcing media choice from organizational contexts could be exclusion of schools from participation in course delivery. Some educational outcomes might be most appropriately taught in school contexts. Further, some open university courses might be offered in cooperation with public schools and community colleges. Public schools might include the courses as part of their adult evening programs or as part of their regular curricula for those students ready to commence

college work. Media centers in community schools might make open university materials available to neighborhood residents. A focus on total delivery systems would help insure old alternatives for receiving instruction are not ignored in the process of creating new ones.

A third erroneous decision that might result from oversight of context in media choice could be development of mediated courses that duplicate existing education efforts of organizations. Such duplication could be wasteful and may engender undesirable competition. For example, an open university may opt to offer mediated courses in continuing education of nurses that teach skills already taught in hospitals or in training programs of a professional nursing society. Use of these organizations in design and delivery of courses might result in making courses more accessible to the learner population, while also avoiding competition in recruiting what might prove to be limited numbers of students.

A fourth erroneous decision, alluded to previously, might be selection of media that are incompatible with the environments in which learning could occur. Assume, for example, that open university courses in accounting could be offered to employees of accounting firms during the work day. Selection of broadcast television might impose time constraints that are inconvenient for the employees. Further, the firms may be resistant to acquiring expensive videotape recorders for viewing circulating tapes or for taping broadcasts for later viewing at more convenient occasions. Selection of television, without reference to organization contexts, might reduce course accessibility and adversely affect course enrollments.

A final error that might result from non-consideration of organizations could be open university creation of new, costly institutions for media support when existing organizations could provide such support with minimal

additional effort. For example, an open university might establish community resource centers for distributing media materials without considering the use of existing public libraries. Similarly, an open university may construct an extensive telecommunications network without considering the use of existing public broadcast stations or community cable systems. Such decisions may needlessly increase overhead costs.

In considering total delivery systems for open education, it may be better to first consider what skills are to be taught and what alternative contexts might be most appropriate for teaching those skills. Such contexts may involve informal organizations, such as civic groups, or more formal organizations, such as recreation departments, businesses, hospitals and even schools. Once contexts are established, attempts can be made to select media that accommodate both the instruction and the learning environment.

Selection Criteria

It may be worthwhile to inquire into what criteria might be useful in deciding which organizations should become part of an open university's total system for delivering instruction. Organizations usually involve the coordination of activities of a number of individuals for the achievement of common purposes or goals, through a division of labor and function and a hierarchy of authority and responsibility (Schein, 1965). Organizations can be considered systems that offer programs, services and products to one or more defined client groups. Often organizations are comprised of several subsystems, each of which may offer <u>different</u> products or services to <u>different</u> client groups (Gibson, Ivancevich, and Donnelly, 1973). Police departments, welfare agencies, hospitals, penitentiaries, agricultural extension services, businesses, consumer protection groups, professional societies and trade

unions are a few of the innumerable organizations that could conceivably assist open universities in the delivery of instruction. In some cases, an organization might assist only with the distribution of a single course or group of courses pertaining to a particular topic. In other cases, an organization may assist in the distribution of courses concerning several different subjects.

Whether an organization would be requested to participate in delivery of open university courses and the kind and degree of participation required would depend upon the nature of the organization. Organization theorists (cf. Shein, 1965; Gibson, Ivancevich and Donnelly, 1973) have indicated salient attributes of organizations which, with modification, may function as selection criteria. Attribute criteria include the nature of an organization's goals and the public it serves, in addition to organization resources, flexibility and philosophy.

Goals

Organizations attempt to attain goals. Airlines seek to provide rapid, convenient transportation at minimal costs. Hospitals attempt to provide quality health care. Agricultural extension services strive to improve farm productivity. Since organizations are unlikely to perform functions which divert from primary goals, one criterion for selecting organizations is the extent to which the education goals of an open university and the goals of an organization are compatible.

Goal compatibility may depend upon the degree to which an organization is engaged in activities related to the subjects taught by an open university. For example, agricultural extension services might help in offering courses in management, botany, biology, and gardening, since they assist farmers in

management and crop care. Goal compatibility may also depend upon the degree to which an organization is committed to education. For example, although agricultural extension services conduct soil tests, monitor insects, and provide consultant services, they also publish materials, sponsor meetings, and otherwise inform farmers of new agricultural techniques. Congruence in organization and open university goals may increase the probability an organization would be willing to assume responsibility for course delivery and may affect the amount of effort an organization devotes to the open education projects it undertakes.

Audience

Organizations provide services and products to populations that differ in nature and size. Community health services, for example, attempt to serve everyone in a community, while welfare agencies, agricultural extension services, and centers for the aged concentrate on serving highly defined subgroups. Overlap in populations served by organizations and audiences intended for instruction is a second selection criterion. Since such organizations would already have contact with the population of potential learners, they would be a convenient means of interfacing learners and courses.

Organizations serving broadly defined populations would be more appropriate for delivering courses with general appeal, while specialized organizations would be more appropriate for delivering courses of more limited interest. For example, a community health service might participate in offering a course in personal hygiene, while a hospital might participate in offering courses on nursing education. When the audience for instruction is extremely broad or comprised of several distinct populations, selection of multiple organizations may be desirable. Public libraries, accounting firms, and agricultural extension agencies, for example, might all participate in

delivering a general accounting course, if the course is of special interest to the general public, neophyte accountants and farmers. Selection of multiple organizations should be done so as to avoid duplication and competition.

Resources

Organizational resources include time, money, personnel, and facilities. Resources of organizations are a third selection criterion, since it is likely some of these resources would have to be allocated to course delivery. If resources needed to support mediated instruction are lacking, new resources would have to be acquired or existing resources would have to be re-allocated. Resource requirements could be so great that some organizations would be unwilling to participate. Other organizations might participate that are unable to acquire or allocate resources of sufficient quantity and quality, thus adversely affecting the adequacy of open university programs. For example, would an agricultural extension service have sufficient personnel with the counseling skills required to guide students? Would a hospital have equipment required for conducting laboratory tests that could be part of a course in nursing education?

Flexibility

Commitments of resources to open education will likely require some organizational adjustments. Some departments may have to acquire new functions or redefine existing fuctions. Personnel may have to assume new roles and acquire new competencies. Ability and willingness of organizations to adjust to change is a fourth selection criterion. If sufficient members of an organization are resistant to supporting open education, organization efforts to assist in course delivery could be consciously or unconsciously sabotaged.

Both the ability of organizations to accommodate change and the magnitude of change required should be considered. Organizations will more easily assume a role in course delivery when change is minimal. Organizational change might be minimized when there is substantial compatibility in organisation and open university goals and overlap in the populations served.

Philosophy

A final selection criterion is organization philosophy. The philosophy of an organization is the system of beliefs shared by its membership. Members of private corporations may share beliefs about the desirability of profits and free markets, while members of health care organizations may value saving human life. These beliefs can influence attitudes toward open education and may work in subtle ways to engender support or resistance to open education programs an organization undertakes. Some businesses might refuse to participate in course delivery because committed resources would not generate profits. Other businesses might perceive participation only as a convenient means of purchasing community good will.

Selection criteria are summarized in Figure 1. The criteria are likely to be expanded and altered with experience, but in their present form, they provide an initial basis for assessing potential organization contributions to open university course delivery. Criteria may be applied to a number of public and private institutions, including public libraries.

Public Libraries and Open Education

Learning can occur when individuals process information, and information retrieval systems, such as public libraries, can be viewed as open, unstructured, individualized instruction systems in which decisions pertaining to outcomes, materials, methods and sequence are controlled by the learner

1. Are the organization's goals compatible with those of open learning?
   A. Does the organization engage in activities related to the subjects taught?
   B. Does the organization have an educational mission?

2. Is there overlap in the population served by an organization and the target audience to be reached by open education?

3. Does the organization have adequate resources to support open learning?
   A. Does the organization have enough resources?
   B. Are the resources (e.g., personnel, facilities) of sufficient quality?

4. Is the organization sufficiently flexible to adopt an open education mission?
   A. Is there a high degree of correspondence between goals and populations served by the organization and objectives to be implemented and audiences to be reached through open education?
   B. Does the organization have a history of innovation and change?

5. Is the philosophy shared by organization membership congruent with the notion of expanding educational alternatives?

Figure 1. Selection Criteria

(Squires and Locatis, In press). Although libraries can be considered amorphous education systems, they can also interface with open universities to provide more structured educational opportunities. Public libraries can become involved in course delivery by: 1) informing learners of available courses, 2) endorsing, sponsoring or conducting courses, 3) providing resources, and 4) certifying learner competence. Degree of involvement might depend on how well libraries meet selection criteria. Some general judgments of how public libraries meet selection criteria are presented below. Although these general judgments might be useful in probing the potential use of public libraries for course delivery, wide variations in public libraries ultimately mandate individual application of criteria.

Goals

Public libraries pursue multiple goals. Although goals vary, three major goals of most public libraries are to provide information, recreation and education. Standard reference materials and services provide information, while collections of media and toys and special programs on hobbies, film and leisure reading promote recreation. Programs on infant care, investing, gardening and other topics, often offered in conjunction with other organizations, provide education. Undoubtedly, learning pervades library activities designed to attain all three types of goals. However, achievement of learning outcomes is more intentional in some programs than in others.

Educational aims of public libraries are reflected in past and present programs. Sponsorship of forums, lectures, and reading programs commenced after the First World War and have continued (Gates, 1968). Recently libraries have cooperated with the College Entrance Examination Board in establishing Library Independent Study and Guidance Projects (Toro, 1974). Participating

libraries collect materials and counsel students in preparing for two year college equivalency exams. One library is authorized to administer exams. Public libraries have also informally assisted students enrolled in Empire State College open university courses, but have not been integrated into the college's total delivery system (Bradley & Palola, 1973).

Public library and open university goals are likely to be compatible. Libraries have educational objectives and have focused on educational programs with wide appeal. An open university fielding an array of general courses might use libraries as a mechanism for course delivery. Libraries might be willing to cooperate because course delivery would be a means for their contributing to general community education needs.

Audience

Libraries serve entire communities. Although services are provided to special groups, these are usually defined in the broadest terms, such as services to children, adults and young adults. Because libraries serve such broadly defined populations, they might assist in course delivery when the audience for instruction is the general public. Basic courses on diverse topics such as psychology, history and biology would be more appropriately delivered by public libraries than courses on more specialized subjects. Libraries want to increase usage since it has implications for funding. Delivery of general courses on a variety of topics may boost patronage.

Resources

Libraries can provide facilities, materials, equipment, and personnel to assist in delivery of instruction. Spaces could be set aside for learning either individually or in small groups. Existing reading and conference rooms might be used for this purpose. Materials in a library's existing

collection could be used to supplement course materials. In addition, libraries could acquire course materials, either by purchase, loan or some other cooperative arrangement. Library personnel could counsel learners, and library audiovisual materials and equipment could be circulated or used internally.

Library resources will vary depending upon the amount of state and local support. Some libraries are pressed for space and lack capital to purchase, process and store materials. Most librarians have general education backgrounds, but lack counseling skill. Finally, many libraries lack audiovisual equipment, since they have started collections of non-print materials only recently. Material and equipment deficiencies might be alleviated by open university loan of these resources to public libraries, and training programs might be devised to provide counseling skills.

Flexibility

Libraries are often perceived as being resistant to change, but some are very innovative. Multi-media collections have been developed and computer technology has been harnessed to improve service. Libraries have established linkages with community cable television systems and have developed outreach programs for minorities and cooperative arrangements for sharing resources with public schools. They are changing from storehouses of information to systems of communication. Information science and management concepts have helped engender change.

The magnitude of innovation in many public libraries indicates they are now more likely to provide services they were unwilling to assume, including course delivery, whether all libraries can make adjustments required for open learning has been questioned (Reimer, 1972) but library cooperation with the

College Entrance Examination Board and Empire State College, although limited, indicates some libraries can make such adaptations (Toro, 1974; Bradley and Palola, 1973).

Philosophy

Public libraries have promoted free service and open access to information (Munthe, 1964). This is at least the rhetoric, if not always the reality (Harris, 1973). In addition, there is increasing belief that librarians should be more active in shaping and developing community information resources rather than simply reacting to expressed information needs. Open education would appear to be congruent with beliefs about open information, while beliefs about community action appear to be consistent with the future planning and involvement required to establish open education systems.

Ideological dilemmas could develop over administrative arrangements for course delivery. Public libraries probably would be unwilling to recruit students or collect fees, although they may provide open universities with space to conduct these activities. They probably would be reluctant to charge for any library provided services and would likely welcome use of library facilities by more than one open university. Some open university administrative requirements might involve libraries in conflicts of interest. Restrictions on use of open university materials, such as circulation only to course registrants, could be objectionable to some libraries.

Conclusion

Open universities should consider total systems for delivering instruction that includes both organizations and media. Failure to account for organizations in media selection may constrict the possible contexts for open education and result in decisions that reduce enrollments, raise costs, and

have other undesirable impacts. Goals, audiences, resources, flexibility and philosophy may be useful organization selection criteria. Public libraries rank high on these criteria. However, variations in libraries necessitate application of criteria on an individual basis.

Questions remain concerning use of public libraries in the delivery of open university courses. One major question relates to the costs and benefits of library participation. Costs will depend upon the resources libraries have available. At one extreme, an open university may finance entirely the establishment and operation of resource centers within public libraries. At the other extreme, open university costs may be limited to coordinating and monitoring library activities. Another question relates to how linkages with libraries would be established. Would linkages be formal or informal? Would libraries be accredited? Franchised? Linkages established will vary depending upon how resources and power are divided among state library commissions and local library boards in different states. A third question relates to how education efforts of different libraries and other participating organizations can be coordinated. Undoubtedly, mechanisms will be needed to integrate information flow. A final major question pertains to how libraries and other participating organizations are to be evaluated. Would the open university or other agencies, such as the American Library Association, be responsible for these assessments? The questions merit additional thought, but may be more appropriately resolved through small scale tryouts. Open universities might use one or two libraries for course delivery on an experimental basis.

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